

Dear friends

I take the liberty of addressing you informally and as “you”, because we share the same great passion, namely the passion for people and their development. And because that is the case, I will also be very open and honest today about my very personal experiences with talent development. Because I don’t believe that my experiences are unique. Rather, I believe that only a few people dare to talk about it in this way.

Let me start with a very personal example of talent development. I am narrating this in French as this episode happened in Estavayer-le-Lac, my home town. We moved from German-speaking Switzerland to French-speaking Switzerland when I was five years old. My father was a Hungarian refugee, my mother German. We spoke High German at home. I had an ICRC document as my identity card, spoke German and was quite tall and especially chubby for my age. My time in kindergarten and primary school was marked by expressions like “Here comes the nazi!” or “Ah! The teuton” quite often and always “Le gros madju”. I can’t remember it exactly, but I must have reacted with a lot of aggression in response to these oversized displays of friendship, even at school. In any case, the school authorities reacted and decided that I was not allowed to return to primary school for sixth grade after the summer holidays. After fifth grade, I had to either manage to skip a year and pass the entrance exam to high school or secondary school or go to an institution for the hard-to-educate for a year.

The main problem for me in the entrance exam was French grammar and spelling, since we spoke German at home. In any case, I managed to get into high school and my spelling and grammar became even worse compared to everyone else in the class.

When my first homework essay was returned in the new high school class, I was more than anxious. But

to my great surprise, no bright red pages with endless corrections came back in the essay workbook.

Instead, it saw there written in green ink: “You still have to work on spelling and grammar, but the story is so great, it deserves best mark: 6”. Grammar and spelling have never been my strong points, but they are decent – and that was soon after this essay.

Bernard Ducarroz, which is the name of my still beloved French teacher, was the first person outside my family to see a talent in me. And if I became quite a decent “writer” of stories, theories, strategies, pamphlets, concepts, books and, of course, lengthy lectures, I owe it mainly to him.

Bernard Ducarroz told my mother, a teacher at the same school as him, after this episode: “You also have to give marks now and then that only evaluate the best part of a piece of work. I call that talent development. And I’m sure Patrick will grow up to be something.”

Let me continue with a second personal example. When I was 13, I started running middle and long distance to get my weight problem under control. As you can see, I never managed to do that all my life. But I got better and better, trained like a maniac, lost 15 kg in a few weeks and gained it right back, battled eating disorders and many injuries. You have to know that I was born with a small hole in my cardiac septum. When my heart pumps, not all the blood goes into the pulmonary circulation, but a very small part goes directly into the other chamber of the heart. This part does not take up any oxygen. That actually rules out the possibility of ever achieving a superior endurance performance. I simply trained more than everyone else to compensate for this. Because I would never have ventured onto a track when there was a risk that I would finish last. Together with my overweight stature, the 160 km or so per week I ran, resulted in five fatigue fractures in my shins. With the last one, and at only seventeen and a half years of age, my active athletics career was suddenly over.

So, I became a coach. I thought, “Even though I’m not good, maybe I can be successful through others and thus become successful myself.” By the time I was 21, I had all the coaching diplomas you could get in Switzerland at the time. And, I apprenticed with the best and most famous coaches of the 80s and 90s. On the side, I also studied law and then business administration, both of which I found very boring and tedious. I much preferred working with my athletes. Of the top ten women in the Swiss all-time best list over 100 hurdles, six had trained with me when I finished my coaching career. So, I certainly had successes, but I must not hide the fact that some of my athletes had made little or no progress at all. Nevertheless, I considered myself a great coach. How many and what big mistakes I had made as a coach became clear to me only years later.

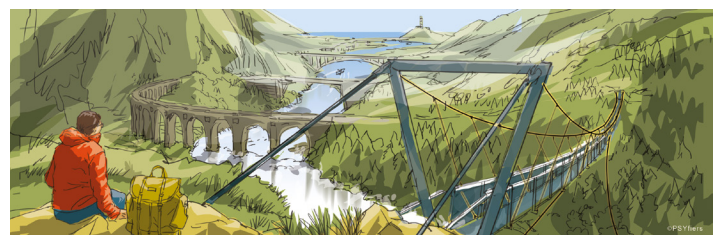
In the last eight years of my coaching career, I was first General Secretary and then Deputy Meeting Director of the athletics meeting “Weltklasse Zürich”, the biggest and most important one-day athletics event in the world at that time and still today. Once again, I was lucky enough to find a person who did not initially pay attention to my weaknesses and my reputation as a swashbuckling know-it-all. Res Brügger is a legend in athletics and among sports organisers worldwide. He trained and shaped me professionally more than any other person. And thanks to him I had success, I may even say great success. This allowed me to have a career that included positions such as founding CEO of FIFA Marketing AG, general manager of the Alinghi sailing team, CEO of the 2014 European Athletics Championships in Zurich or managing director of SwissSkills 2018 and SwissSkills Marketing.

But these successes didn’t just come about only because I was so smart and beautiful 😊. I also worked very, very hard. When I left the Meeting in 1998 as Deputy Meeting Director, I was replaced with a total of 2.8 positions. In the years that followed, I realised more and more why I worked so much as a coach, as a meeting organiser and in all the jobs

afterwards. I am simply more afraid than most people. I have no fear of others. No, that’s where I feel big and strong. I am afraid of not achieving what I feel I should achieve. Simply put, I have a fear of failing. Meanwhile, I think that this fear is in all of us to a certain extent – let’s exclude people like Elon Musk or Donald Trump here. In fact, I am convinced that this fear is one of the biggest drivers of people, but perhaps also causes some of their biggest blockage.

That’s enough personal information for today. You all know now that I am too heavy and that I work too much to make sure that nothing goes wrong. But I have been very lucky in my life. I was able to overcome many of my fears and problems thanks to the support of great people and – first of all – thanks to the support of my dearest wife Gabriela. And, I have learned lessons from these experiences. These lessons flow into my life, my work and my products and this is what I would like to talk about now.

Many years of experience and leading performance-oriented people and teams have taught myself and my three partners at PSYfiers that success is essentially based on the same success factors. These build on each other and we therefore describe them as stages on the “journey to genuine success”.



<https://psyfiers.ch/en/blog/2020/12/29/the-journey-to-genuine-success>

However, these stages are not only based on experience with others, but are also strongly autobiographic. If I had known and applied what I am telling you now earlier, I would have been a better coach, a better manager and a greater team player.

Stage 1: Self-knowledge

The process to get to “know oneself” is always the first step towards success. Personally, I also find it one of the most difficult ones. One of our tools, the Visual Implicit Profiler (VIP)®, helps us get started here. How good it is can be seen from the fact that the VIP, under the name SwissSkills Mission Future School, has been downloaded by over 1,000 teachers and used with over 10,000 students in the last four weeks alone. This jump-start is necessary, because successful planning and action requires knowledge of one’s own strengths, the knowledge of what one can rely on in oneself. It helps enormously when the recognition of potential can happen in an exchange of at least two parties involved. Especially for people with fears and little self-confidence, this dialogue helps to create a positive cognitive space. In this way, talents and strengths can be better recognised and used later. In the field of education and professional development, teachers, coaches and educators of all kinds, HR persons but also bosses should therefore have a very special role as “midwives” of undiscovered potential.

Stage 2: Recognising diversity and otherness

Those who are very precise, methodical and strategic are not necessarily creative, spontaneous and compassionate at the same time. If you first explore your own strengths and then turn to the strengths of others, you almost always realise that there are people, who are more comfortable with certain topics, but that there are also those who you are a bit ahead of. Diversity and otherness are not just about origin, skin colour or gender. Diversity starts with personality.

Stage 3: Acceptance of diversity and otherness

The next step is to accept this diversity. For this to work, three prerequisites are needed. Firstly, everyone must have already dealt with their own strengths to build up the necessary self-confidence. Secondly, everyone must have the opportunity to contribute their own strengths. And then thirdly, proximity is needed. Engaging with other people personally increases familiarity, creates intimacy. This first creates closeness and then acceptance.

Stage 4: Trust

Closeness and acceptance are the basis on which you can build trust in each other. Words do not count. Deeds are needed! Even better, role models! If you behave the way others like to treat you, you automatically create trust. And they destroy it just as quickly when their actions suddenly no longer match their words.

Before I come to the fifth and final stage, I must make a brief **digression**. Allow me to ask how much these four stages are represented in our vocational training, recruitment and promotion system. Personally, I think: WAY TOO LITTLE! Everyone talks about “competences” and “people at the core”. But the reality is that tests such as Multicheck are still important in the Swiss market, although in my view they reduce the person to a data carrier, one might almost say a USB stick. I am also constantly told that soft skills or, in other words, strengths are really important to recognise and train at school or in the workplace. But as soon as you get concrete, you realise that not all that much happens. Because somehow there always seems to be a lack of time and resources and perhaps also a lack of will.

So, you can imagine how much of a fan I am of Swisscom’s “Person before dossier” pilot project. Incidentally, it is not at all up for discussion that school grades are no longer important. Certain jobs can only be done when the appropriate educational framework is in place. But dealing first with the person and only then with his or her school backpack is, in my view, the right way to go. And not only from a human point of view, but above all for reasons of efficiency and effectiveness. Today, knowledge changes almost daily. Basic personality traits, on the other hand, are incredibly stable over time.

And that brings me to the last and, from my point of view, all-important **5th stage, the decision**. The first four stages can also be applied in a family or among friends. However, to be successful in a project or a profession requires that one has a goal

in mind – for oneself or for a group. I therefore claim freely after Plutarch: “Talent development is not the filling of a bucket, but igniting a fire.” And the best way to ignite this fire is to look at a person’s strengths and personality before deciding on the right learning method, the best way to gain experience or the appropriate form of criticism and correction.

An example! This spring I was allowed to work with twelve SwissSkills experts who supervise World- or EuroSkills candidates and prepare them for these major championships. These experts are all masters of their trade and have a lot of experience. Yet, all twelve have now adopted my credo and start their cooperation with their candidates with a dialogue. On the basis of the Mission Career profile, they first talk about strengths, preferred roles and how candidate and expert can better understand and communicate with each other. Because, whoever realises that he or she can build on strengths loses or at least reduces the fear of failure. Those who realise that they can benefit from another person, even though or precisely because that person is different – not better and not worse, but with their own history and their own experiences – are much more willing to accept and embrace what this person says and does.

For me, **talent development** is first and foremost about **discovering potential** and **helping people deal with the fears** that can reduce or even block the use of that potential. I wish you all good luck in igniting the fire!

Thank you very much for your attention!